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ABSTRACT

This booklet is the 13th in a series of "hot topic" reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come to the laboratory from the Northwest region and beyond. Each booklet contains a discussion of research and literature pertinent to the issue, a sampling of how Northwest schools are addressing the issue, suggestions for adapting these ideas to schools, selected references, and contact information. This booklet takes a look at what has been learned so far about school-homeschool cooperation and offers tips and suggestions for building successful partnerships with homeschooling families. The Northwest Sampler profiles several different Northwest school systems that have implemented programs to reach out to students who are learning at home and that have worked to accommodate homeschoolers' requests for involvement.(Contains 29 references.) (DFR)

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MAKING POSITIVE CONNECTIONS WITH HOMESCHOOLERS

JANUARY 2000

NORTHWEST REGIONAL
EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

EA 030 750

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JENNIFER FAGER
&
CORI BREWSTER

JANUARY 2000

NORTHWEST REGIONAL
EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

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FOREWORD

This booklet is the 13th in a series of "hot topic" reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come to the Laboratory from the Northwest region and beyond. Each booklet contains a discussion of research and literature pertinent to the issue, a sampling of how Northwest schools are addressing the issue, suggestions for adapting these ideas to schools, selected references, and contact information.

One objective of the series is to foster a sense of community and connection among educators. Another is to increase awareness of current education-related themes and concerns. Each booklet gives practitioners a glimpse of how fellow educators are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success. The goal of the series is to give educators current, reliable, and useful information on topics that are important to them.

Other titles in the series include:

- *Service Learning in the Northwest Region*
- *Tutoring: Strategies for Successful Learning*
- *Scheduling Alternatives: Options for Student Success*
- *Grade Configuration: Who Goes Where?*
- *Alternative Schools: Approaches for Students at Risk*
- *All Students Learning: Making It Happen in Your School*
- *High-Quality Professional Development: An Essential Component of Successful Schools*
- *Student Mentoring*
- *Peaceful Schools*
- *After-School Programs: Good for Kids, Good for Communities*
- *Parent Partners: Using Parents to Enhance Education*
- *When Students Don't Succeed: Shedding Light on Grade Retention*

INTRODUCTION

Just 20 years ago, many educators would have balked at the idea of homeschoolers requesting permission to participate in public school activities. Few would have believed that homeschooling parents—who fought so hard for the right to remove their children from formal school settings—would be at all interested in the programs and services public schools provide. However, as homeschooling has become both more common and more widely accepted as an alternative to public education, the relationship between schools and homeschoolers has begun to change. Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow (1995) note that "since the mid-1980s, homeschool parents increasingly have sought to cooperate with school boards, principals, and teachers." At the same time, more and more schools have opened their doors to homeschooled children, offering access to libraries and computer labs, participation in school athletic programs, and, in some cases, part-time enrollment in regular academic classes (Lines, 1996). It is no longer unusual to find a homeschooled student playing in the school band, working side-by-side with regular public education students on a science project, or sending an e-mail to a district teacher to ask for help in English or math.

While many schools voluntarily open their doors to homeschoolers, others are mandated to serve these students by courts or state law. In other areas, costly court battles ensue as homeschoolers fight school districts for various services and accommodations. In the meantime, the number of children being homeschooled in the United States continues to grow. Over the past two decades, the number has skyrocketed, from approximately 15,000 home taught students in 1980 to an estimated 700,000 in the 1995-96 school year (Lines, 1995; Lines, 1999). If this trend continues, serving students who aren't regularly enrolled in the public school will become inevitable.

If successful partnerships between schools and homeschoolers are to be developed, educators need to begin thinking about how best to serve non-public school students (Mayberry et al., 1995; Pearson, 1996). As research and experience show, thoughtfully conceived programs can benefit both students and schools. This booklet takes a look at what has been learned so far about school-homeschool cooperation and offers tips and suggestions for building successful partnerships with homeschooling families. The Northwest Sampler profiles several different Northwest school systems that have implemented programs to reach out to students who are learning at home and who have worked to accommodate homeschoolers' requests for involvement.

In Context: Why Reach Out to Homeschoolers?

Plans to develop partnerships with homeschooling families are often met by resistance from some educators (Mayberry et al., 1995; Natale, 1992). Certainly, the notion of spending already limited resources on a group who has chosen to remove themselves from the public education system can sound like a waste of both money and time.

So, why *should* schools attempt to build partnerships with homeschoolers? Perhaps the most compelling reason is simply to benefit students (Knowles, Marlow & Muchmore, 1992; Simmons 1994). Keeping in mind the mission of public schools, partnerships between schools and homeschoolers only makes sense. Whether a child is enrolled full-time in a formal school setting or not, the goal of public education remains the same: to improve learning outcomes by providing quality educational experiences for all school-aged children (Mayberry & Knowles, 1989; Pearson, 1996). Beyond this, however, are three main incentives for cooperating with homeschooled students and their parents:

- *Legislation*: Although laws vary from state to state, courts and legislatures across the country are increasingly supporting homeschoolers' requests for access to public school facilities, resources, and activities (Mayberry et al., 1995). While some states require only that public schools allow homeschoolers to participate in school sports and other extracurricular activities, other states, such as Oregon, Idaho, and Washington, require schools to accommodate homeschoolers' requests for much broader types of participation, including

part-time enrollment in regular school classes (Brockett, 1995; Mayberry et al., 1995). For schools in these states, the question is no longer "if they should collaborate with homeschoolers, but how?"

- *Enrollment & Funding Increases*: Depending on local regulations governing school funding calculations, school districts may be able to receive funding for serving homeschooled children (Knowles, 1989; Mayberry et al., 1995; Natale, 1992). According to Holt (1983), most "school districts are free to register home-taught students in their schools-listing them as participants in a special program and collecting the proper amount of state aid." This money can be used not only to support services for homeschoolers, but may also mean extra dollars left over for other school programs (Guterson, 1992; Hill, 1996). Private schools can also benefit financially from collaborating with homeschoolers by charging a pro-rated tuition for students who are enrolled in special programs or participating on a part-time basis in regular classes (Mayberry et al., 1995).

- *Returning Students*: A third incentive for collaborating with homeschoolers is to maintain positive working relationships with students who may eventually re-enroll in the school. Lines (1995) notes that "many children are homeschooled for only a few years." This being the case, it is in the best interests of both schools and homeschooled students to work together. Students who have maintained a positive relationship with the public school and whose academic progress has been regularly evaluated in relationship to the school's curriculum will have an easier transition back into the classroom (Mayberry et al., 1995).

Additional benefits of reaching out to homeschoolers include:

- An improved school/district image within the larger community that results from the collaborative attitude that is evident in any school-home partnership (Mayberry & Knowles, 1989; Natale, 1992).
- A reassurance to concerned educators that homeschooled students' needs are truly being met and that they are making adequate educational progress (Dahm, 1996).
- An enhanced academic and social environment for both traditional and homeschooled students that results from the added diversity each group brings to the other (Mayberry et al., 1995).

Whether individual educators support the idea of homeschooling or not, the trend is clearly toward cooperating with homeschooling families. The question put before schools now is how to work with homeschoolers to maximize learning opportunities for students while mutually benefiting and meeting the needs of all parties (Mayberry et al., 1995).

Research: What do Homeschoolers Want?

To be sure, not all homeschooling families *want* to work with schools. Of those who do, there will be many differences in the types of services they need, the public school facilities and activities they want access to, and the level of involvement they are comfortable with (Mayberry et al., 1995). The bottom line is that most homeschoolers want to maintain control over their children's education (Mirochnik & McIntire, 1991). As long as their authority and their autonomy are respected, however, homeschoolers may be open to a wide range of services and activities sponsored by the local school district (Guterson, 1992).

According to Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, and Marlow (1995), the programs and services homeschoolers are most interested in are:

- Use of school libraries
- Achievement testing
- Textbooks
- Sports programs, band, and other extracurricular activities
- Access to research on home education
- Part-time enrollment in certain classes, such as foreign language, drama, vocational education, music, driver's education, and higher-level math and science (see also Brockett, 1995)

Homeschooling parents are least interested in:

- Health screening
- Special education
- Counseling and psychological services

(Ray [1991] cited in Mirochnik & McIntire, 1991)

The best way to find out what types of programs homeschooling families in your district would welcome is to ask them (Guterson, 1992). Because homeschoolers in most states are required to register with the school district or state each year, administrators should have little trouble locating them to discuss their needs and the types of services that are of interest to them. If districts are unable to track homeschoolers on their own, local and state homeschooling organizations may be able to provide the necessary information.

It should be noted that homeschoolers in many areas have already developed extensive networks through which they exchange ideas, share textbooks, and offer small group classes and activities (Mayberry et al., 1995). Schools may want to consider working directly with homeschooling groups and organizations to determine local needs and design programs if such groups are open to a partnership. Doing so would help prevent duplication of services, would provide an opportunity to build more productive relationships with the homeschooling community, and could lead to increased buy-in for the program among homeschooling parents.

Implementation Ideas

Partnerships between schools and homeschoolers can take services to staffed learning centers for home taught students (Knowles et al., 1992). These programs don't necessarily have to be for homeschoolers only—public, private, and charter school students may be served by some of these programs as well. Listed below are a few of the more common kinds of programs and services schools can offer. For profiles of specific programs Northwest schools have implemented to serve homeschoolers and other non-public school students, see the Northwest Sampler in the second half of this booklet.

- **Access to school resources & facilities**: Schools can contribute to homeschoolers' education by allowing students to use school libraries, computer labs, scientific equipment, gymnasiums, and other school facilities (Guterson, 1992). Schools may wish to open the doors to homeschooling parents as well, inviting them to use school libraries and computers to research teaching strategies, educational resources, and different areas of their curriculum (Mayberry et al., 1995). Depending on the number of homeschoolers wishing to use school facilities, it may be necessary to set specific times during the day or evening that facilities will be available to them.

- **Assistance with curriculum planning, testing, and evaluation**: School districts can support homeschoolers by providing information about child development and student learning, making textbooks and other teaching tools available, and assisting parents with curriculum planning, student assessment, and evaluation (Dahm, 1996). Administering achievement tests and proctoring exams are other ways schools can both support homeschoolers and ensure that students' academic progress is being regularly evaluated.

- **Curriculum subsidies:** If funding is available, schools can offer to help homeschoolers buy books, curricula, educational videos, and other supplies (Hill, 1996). Some districts give a portion of the state funding they receive for serving homeschoolers back to parents, allotting a set amount each year for parents to spend on "school-district approved textbooks and other teaching tools" (Natale, 1992).

- **Opportunities to volunteer:** Homeschoolers can play a valuable role as school volunteers, working as tutors, reading to younger students, or serving as instructional aides in elementary and middle school classrooms (Holt, 1983). A volunteer program benefits both teachers, who get a helping hand in their classroom, and homeschooled students, who can develop academic, job, and/or social skills while working in the school building (Hancock, 1994; Holt, 1983).

- **Part-time or dual enrollment:** A service schools can provide without having to develop a special program is part-time or dual enrollment for non-public school students. As is now required in several states, schools can enroll interested homeschoolers part-time in regular school courses and other curricular programs. Part-time enrollment allows participating homeschoolers to supplement their home curriculum with specialized courses and classes their parents may be unable to teach, such as foreign language, art, advanced math and science, and vocational education (Guterson, 1992; Mayberry et al, 1995). Part-time enrollment also benefits schools, who may be able to collect partial state funding (Guterson, 1992; Knowles, 1989; Mayberry et al., 1995).

- **Sports and other extracurricular activities:** Another service schools can offer is to open athletic programs and other extracurricular activities to homeschoolers, allowing homeschooled students to participate in organized sports, after school clubs, the school band, or act in school plays

(Blum, 1996; Diegmueller, 1995; Guterson, 1992). To be fair to regularly enrolled students, schools should adopt minimum academic requirements for homeschoolers equivalent to those that conventional students must meet in order to participate in extracurricular activities (Brockett, 1995; Natale, 1992).

- **Visiting teacher programs:** In visiting teacher programs, the school district hires one or more certified teachers to oversee homeschoolers' educational progress. In the Des Moines Public School System's Home Instruction Program, for example, district teachers work with parents to develop educational plans for the school year and then meet with the family once every two weeks to monitor students' progress. Visiting teachers also offer guidance, share teaching ideas, and provide resources and information parents request. The program considers parents to be the primary educators, allowing them to choose "the curriculum they will follow, the type of assistance they would like from teachers, a method of evaluation, and whether their child will attend the neighborhood school part-time" (Dahm, 1996). With this type of program, the school district can increase enrollment and stay in touch with homeschoolers' progress at the same time it offers parents the resources and support needed to successfully teach their children at home.

- **Internet courses and programs:** An option for serving homeschoolers who aren't interested in working in the school building is to provide distance education courses over the Internet. The Federal Way School District in Washington, for example, operates an Internet Academy for K-12 students which offers on-line courses, class chat rooms, and e-mail and phone support from supervising district teachers. Students enrolled in the program can take one or two courses to supplement their home curriculum or can sign up to take all of their classes on-line (MSNBC, 1998). Students

who don't have computers at home can use a district computer lab or computers at public libraries to access the Internet Academy. Other Internet programs, such as the Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA) program, provide participating homeschoolers personal computers and other necessary supplies (Sandham, 1998). Although these types of programs take a lot of work to start up—developing Web-based curriculum, getting computers networked, etc.—they have a number of advantages for students and schools: students earn credit from an accredited public school; students' progress can be measured in relation to a standard school curriculum; and school districts can increase both enrollment and revenue (Hancock, 1994; Natale, 1995; Sandham, 1998). See page 34 for a full description of one Northwest school district that has recently implemented an Internet school.

- **Learning centers:** Schools can serve homeschooled students and their families by setting up special centers for homeschoolers that offer a combination of some or all of the above services (Hill, 1996). These centers, housed in a public school building or an alternate location, can offer computer labs, weekly group classes and activities, a curriculum resource center, testing services, and other services specifically for homeschooled youth (Brockett, 1995; Mayberry et al., 1995). Such centers may be staffed by one or more certified teachers who are available to teach small group classes and provide individualized instruction to students who need additional help. Weekly group activities may include field trips, hands-on science and art projects, physical education classes, and other group learning experiences (Dahm, 1996). The learning center can also serve as a resource center for parents, offering seminars on curriculum planning, computer skills, child development, etc.

No matter what type of program or service your school decides to offer, it can't succeed unless students and parents know it is available (Mayberry et al., 1995). Be sure to advertise widely in order to reach all homeschoolers in the area (Pearson, 1996). Posting fliers at public libraries is one way to reach homeschooling families. It is also be helpful to ask local and state homeschooling organizations to post announcements about the program on their Web-sites, at meetings, or in their newsletters.

Working Together: Building Successful Relationships with Homeschool Families

Few would deny that over the past two decades, relationships between schools and homeschoolers have often been rocky, if not purely adversarial. Moving from this type of relationship to one that is both cooperative and productive may not be easy (Mayberry et al., 1995). The first step to building a mutual trust with homeschooling parents and building successful relationships with them is to respect their choice to educate their children at home (Mirochnik & McIntire, 1991). Whether or not educators feel that homeschooling is an appropriate or effective method of educating children is not pertinent. It is important to acknowledge parents' right to make that decision for themselves.

Next, it is important to understand parents' needs, attitudes, and motivations for teaching their children at home (Dahm, 1996). Contrary to common belief, the decision to homeschool is not limited to religious individuals or members of "fringe" groups—homeschooling parents across the country represent all income brackets, education levels, races, and political and religious affiliations (Hawkins, 1996; Mayberry et al., 1995; Wagenaar, 1997). Dahm (1996) notes that many homeschooling families, for whatever reason, simply do not trust public schools to teach their children and provide a safe learning environment for them. The lack of trust may center around issues of school violence and safety, conflicting moral values, class sizes, school standards, or other issues around teaching methodology (Dahm, 1996; Simmons, 1994).

Most parents who homeschool:

- Are willing to collaborate with schools in some capacity to provide children with the best education possible
- Want to be treated not just as parents, but as educators
- Want to be in control of their children's education
- Want to exercise their moral and religious beliefs without interference from schools
- May be suspicious of school programs and may be concerned that their rights are in jeopardy when working with school personnel

(Mirochnik & McIntire, 1991)

In order for school-homeschool partnerships to be effective, students and parents must feel that programs address their needs and respect their boundaries (Mayberry et al., 1995). For the greatest chances of success, teachers and administrators working with homeschooling families should remember the following guidelines:

- Treat parents with respect (Mirochnik & McIntire, 1991)
- Be flexible; allow parents to choose their own curriculum, make decisions about evaluation and assessment methods, and maintain primary control over their children's involvement in the program (Dahm, 1996; Mayberry et al., 1995)
- Be clear with parents about what participation in school programs will entail, letting them know what will be expected of them, what obligations they will have to the school district, and what rules and policies they must agree to, etc. (Mayberry et al., 1995)

- Make an effort to include homeschool families in all areas of school activities and decisionmaking (Mirochnik & McIntire, 1991)
- Keep lines of communication open. Distributing a monthly newsletter is a good way to keep parents informed about classes and services available to them, program changes, and student achievements (Mayberry et al., 1995). Asking parents to regularly evaluate the program is another way to ensure that the program continues to meet parents' and students' needs.

TROUBLESHOOTING: DEVELOPING POLICIES TO ADDRESS COMMON PROBLEMS

Three areas schools often stumble over when opening their doors to homeschoolers are the separation of church and state, performance requirements for participation in extracurricular activities, and questions about priority for enrollment in limited-space-available classes and activities (Brockett, 1995; Diegmueller, 1995). To avoid conflicts—and also to head off criticism from opponents of school-homeschool collaboration—schools are advised to develop policies that address each of these areas before they become problems.

- *Avoid conflicts over state support of religious activities:* Many homeschooling parents choose Christian-based texts or other religious materials and curricula to teach their children. When providing educational services to these families, it is a good idea to have a policy in place which sets parameters for the program regarding the separation of church and state. One district's policy makes clear that, while homeschooled parents are free to choose their own curriculum, the school district "cannot be involved in teaching religious doctrine and cannot purchase materials, for instruction or resale, which are religious in nature" (Brockett, 1995).
- *Set standards for participation in extracurricular activities:* A common criticism of allowing homeschoolers to participate in extracurricular activities, such as school athletics programs, is that homeschoolers aren't held to the same attendance and grade requirements as regularly enrolled students (Blum, 1996; Diegmueller, 1995). Some even fear that full-time students who don't meet the academic requirements to play on school teams will drop out, opting

for homeschooling as a way to get around their low grades and remain on the team (Brockett, 1995). To avoid these kinds of situations, many schools have developed academic performance requirements for homeschoolers who want to take part in extracurricular activities (Blum, 1996). In order to participate, homeschoolers must be making satisfactory academic progress, which can be measured by standardized testing or through an evaluation plan agreed upon by both the parents and the school district (Brockett, 1995).

- *Develop a policy for enrollment in limited-space-available classes:* If your school plans to allow homeschoolers to take classes part time, discuss how registration will work for popular classes that only accommodate a limited number of students. The state of Idaho, which offers "dual enrollment" in public schools for both private school students and homeschoolers, allows non-public school students to sign up for classes on a space-available basis: "If enrollment in a specific program reaches the maximum for the program, priority for enrollment shall be given to a student who is enrolled full-time in the public school" (Idaho Code 33-203).

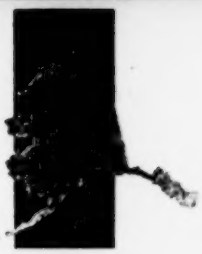
Conclusion

The United States Department of Education estimates that around 2 percent of America's school-aged children are being taught at home (Lines, 1996). Another 11 percent are enrolled in private and charter schools or other alternative educational programs. As these numbers continue to grow, so do the numbers of non-public school students-homeschoolers in particular—who want access to public school resources, activities, and classrooms. In the face of this, schools are increasingly being put in a position to rethink the boundaries of public education and consider ways they can serve all students—not just those enrolled full-time in the public school.

Although some educators may initially object to spending time and resources opening doors to homeschoolers and other non-public school students, service to homeschooling families cannot be avoided. Rather than wait for courts or legislation to mandate cooperation with these students, schools would do well to reach out to homeschoolers first. Taking the time now to explore ways to serve homeschoolers will give schools a better chance of developing programs that meet their own needs as well as the needs of homeschooling students and families. Whether a school chooses to provide homeschoolers with textbooks and other educational resources or to involve non-public school students in classes and activities on school grounds, both the school and its students—public, homeschooled, and otherwise—will benefit.

THE NORTHWEST SAMPLER

The following pages contain descriptions of four school systems that continually work to reach out to homeschool students and families. These Northwest programs represent some of the promising strategies being implemented in schools around the nation. Two are fledgling efforts, while the others have been in existence for several years. Each has selected a unique method for connecting with homeschool students. One is a charter school; one is a state-run correspondence school; one is an Internet school; and one is an alternative school program. All utilize very different approaches, but with one goal in common: to provide effective educational service to homeschool students. Included for each location is contact information, a description of the program, observed outcomes as a result of the program, and tips directly from these educators to others looking to implement similar efforts.



Location

Alyeska Central School
801 West 10th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

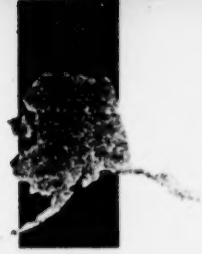
Contact

Michael Opp, Director
Phone: (Toll Free) 1-888-290-3752
Fax: 907/465-2935
Web Site:
http://www.educ.state.ak.us/alaskan_schools/acs/home.html
E-mail: acsmail@educ.state.ak.us

Description

Options for homeschooling abound in Alaska, where it is not only an educational choice, but a necessity for many families who do not have access to a school. Recognizing this need officially in 1939, the state implemented a correspondence school system that allowed students, regardless of location, to receive a free public education. Called Alyeska Central School (ACS), this correspondence system is a fully accredited K-12 public school and a division of the Alaska Department of Education. It provides correspondence instruction to any Alaskan who does not have a high school diploma. The school's 25 certified teachers and 25 support staff are located in Juneau, but serve students throughout the state. ACS operates under the supervision of the Alaska Commissioner of Education and the Alaska Board of Education.

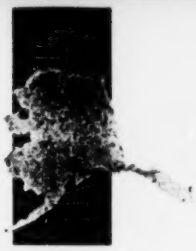
Currently, the school serves over 4,000 students (some part-time). The mission of ACS is to actively engage students in learning. Additionally, several goals guide the work at ACS:



- Empower families through active involvement in the education process
- Provide support and training to the home teachers who work directly with the students
- Develop a student's ability to access resources and information, to communicate effectively, to solve problems, to use technology, and to make informed decisions
- Continually improve the quality of educational services

Instruction at ACS is tailored to the needs of each student and aligned with state standards and benchmarks. ACS curriculum uses standard textbooks accompanied by lesson plans developed by ACS teachers. Because most lessons are developed at ACS and not purchased from an outside source, students can take courses that are particularly relevant to Alaskans, such as Alaskan literature, Alaska zoology or botany, animal nutrition, trapping, and small boat handling. Traditional courses like trigonometry, Spanish, chemistry, and English are also part of the curriculum. ACS provides all necessary materials for every course. The magnitude of this effort is evidenced by the school's enormous warehouse facility that contains everything from textbooks, workbooks, and computers, to beakers, safety goggles, and calculators.

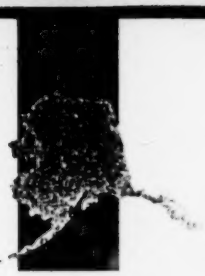
Students receive their daily lessons from home teachers (usually a parent), but assignments and tests are evaluated by ACS teachers who also provide regular support (either by phone or e-mail) and instructional assistance. Generally, it is expected that students will complete one curriculum unit per subject per month. Courses are structured to take students approximately nine months to complete, but some take more or less time depending on student interest and effort. ACS teachers monitor the progress of each student and keep in contact with families to ensure any issues are resolved quickly. Accountability



for attendance is based on students sending in work on a regular basis; students can be dropped from enrollment if they do not turn in work as scheduled.

Teacher work loads at ACS are similar to those in public schools, though the lack of daily student contact and the addition of parents as regular home teachers raises the numbers of students ACS teachers oversee somewhat. In the elementary grades there is approximately one certified teacher for every 55 students, and at the secondary level there is one certified teacher for every 200 students. ACS teachers work year round. When they are not actively teaching, or if they have a lighter than normal student load, many teachers spend time writing new courses or revising older ones. These courses are often purchased by districts throughout the state and used for homeschool and credit-delayed students. Further, it is not uncommon for these courses to be used in classrooms by pubic school teachers.

In addition to regular course offerings, ACS also offers a general equivalency degree (GED) program and an individual study program called Your Choice. The GED program is available to any adult Alaskan without a high school diploma and is coordinated by an ACS teacher who specializes in adult education. The Your Choice program is available to any high school student who wants to create a plan of study for a particular course. Students generally base their Your Choice work on a hobby or career interest. For example, one ACS student learned how to do taxidermy. She arranged a work experience with a local museum, and later did a presentation for which she won a college scholarship. Another student decided he wanted to learn how to build homes. After study and work experience, he built a retirement home for his parents. A third student started his own small motor repair business. All Your Choice courses are designed jointly by the student and the ACS counselor, who approves course proposals.



Beyond instruction, ACS offers a variety of other resources to students and their families including a lending library with a collection of over 17,000 items, a computer loan program with technology support, school counselors, and a print shop. ACS also offers a limited student activities program. And like most schools in this era of increased school accountability, ACS has a parent advisory board that oversees its operations and interactions with families. The board, called the Parent Outreach Leadership Team (POLT) acts as an advisory team to the school director and as ambassadors for ACS throughout their communities and the state.

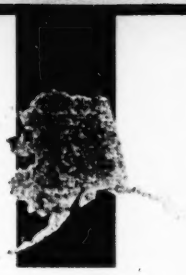
The future of ACS appears to be strong. With a growing homeschool market and technological advances in electronic communication, the school will be able to reach even more students in coming years. ACS also supports a budding summer school program that is available not only to homeschool students, but public school students as well. It serves students who want to advance their studies over the summer, and those who need to catch up on lost credits. It also provides a way for students to prepare for the state high school qualifying exam they are required to pass before receiving a high school diploma. In the summer of 1999, over 2,000 Alaskan students participated in ACS summer school programs.

Student Perspective

When one envisions meeting a student who has been homeschooled his entire life, certain images may come to mind—perhaps someone who is a bit awkward, maybe a little unsure of himself, or even uncomfortable around unknown groups of people. It is normal to have such preconceived ideas, but such notions can be quickly shattered. Such is the case with the ACS student I met. Levi quickly fills a room with his charisma and personality. Neither awkward, nor unsure of himself, this 18-year-old met me with a smile and a firm handshake. We talked at length about his three-year experience as an ACS student, as well as his dreams and ambitions for life beyond high school.

Levi's family moved to Juneau four years ago and easily embraced ACS as the homeschool option for them. Both Levi and his sister have since graduated from ACS and have embarked on college careers. When asked what he liked best about ACS, Levi quickly noted the school's flexibility to fit within his family's schedule, the structure of the coursework, and the timelines and assistance he received. He spoke of his gratitude for the responsive, helpful nature of ACS teachers and staff, and their continued willingness to adapt the instructional program to his individual needs.

An average school day for Levi resembled schedules held by high school students everywhere, but the flexibility of ACS allowed him to work as a ski instructor one day a week at a local ski resort. It also afforded him the opportunity to obtain his pilot's license, while providing him with credit at the same time. Though his mother was his primary teacher in previous years of homeschooling, once enrolled in ACS, Levi was able to supplement his home instruction with regular assistance from certified teachers. His mother still oversaw all aspects of planning his education as well as administration of exams.



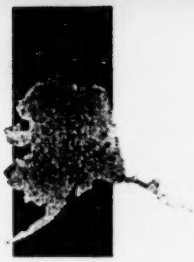
My discussion with Levi reinforced the fact that isolation and socialization are a matter of individual choice for all students. His high level of community involvement, which included community sports, work at a local radio station and ski resort, flight lessons, volunteer time with a local civil air patrol organization, and service as the student representative on ACS' Parent Advisory Board, proved that opportunities are always available to those who are interested.

Observed Outcomes

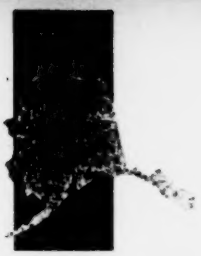
- ACS students are readily accepted at universities and colleges through the U.S. Because standard academic records are kept for all ACS students, they do not experience the difficulties transitioning to public schools or institutions of higher education that often plague traditional homeschoolers.
- In 1992 ACS was recognized by the International Reading Association for its exemplary reading program.
- As an alternative public education program, ACS allows students to pursue unusual sports or personal interests while simultaneously completing their education.

Keys to Success

- Avoid inexpensive curriculum materials when implementing a program targeted at homeschoolers. What you save in cost you often sacrifice in quality and consequently do a disservice to students.



- Thoroughly research the homeschool market before you determine what the scope of your services will be. Find out what is working in neighboring communities and what the homeschooling families in your community want. Remember that your program should be tailored to the specific needs of the students you serve.
- Work to maintain a high level of organization in your program as it is critical to efficient, high quality service.



Location

Family Partnership Charter School
Anchorage School District
3339 Fairbanks Street
Anchorage, AK 99503

Contact

Tim Scott, Administrator
Phone: 907/742-3700
Fax: 907/742-3710
Website: http://www.asd.k12.ak.us/schools/fpcs/fpcs.html

Description

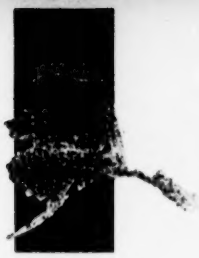
Instruction has never been more individualized than it is at the Family Partnership Charter School (FPCS) in Anchorage. Parents who choose homeschooling as an alternative to traditional public education are able to tap into this charter school, and take advantage of district instructional expertise while still retaining full control over their children's education. Created by homeschooling families, the charter school acts as a clearinghouse of educational services for homeschooling families in the Anchorage community. It opened in 1997 with 136 students as Anchorage's fourth charter school. Approximately 660 students in grades K-12 were enrolled at FPCS in the 1999-2000 school year, with over 100 teachers providing instructional services

FPCS works by providing homeschooled students and their families with instruction by certified teachers for courses they might not otherwise have access to or feel comfortable teaching (i.e. chemistry, dance, piano, advanced mathematics, or writing). Anchorage teachers who sign-on with FPCS (all FPCS teachers are part-time) provide the school with an summary of their

expertise and descriptions of the courses they are available to teach. This information is kept in several three-ring binders and made available to parents as they decide what courses and teachers they would like to pursue. FPCS does not guarantee teachers any specified amount of work, instead, families choose what teachers and courses will best suit their needs.

The school operates much like a bank. Each family receives approximately $2,400 per child in an FPCS account at the beginning of each school year. This money represents a portion of the per pupil funding the district receives from the state. The remainder of the money is used for school/district administrative and overhead costs. Out of each family's school-controlled account comes money for teacher salaries, textbooks, and other materials necessary for each class. Teachers are paid hourly based on their position on the district's salary scale; generally, this falls somewhere between $20 and $40 per hour. The school's policy requires all participating students to use a portion of their allotment to purchase a minimum of 18 hours of teacher time every year (roughly one hour every two weeks). Monthly statements are sent to each family detailing the amount of money they have left in their FPCS account. This allows them to monitor their instructional spending and budget accordingly. If they run out of their FPCS money during the school year, they can pay out-of-pocket for additional classes.

To enroll at FPCS, students must register with the district, a process that includes providing transcripts and health information. FPCS staff members or parent mentors assist families in the enrollment process, helping them select the right teachers, supplies, and services for their particular needs. Once a student is enrolled at FPCS, they determine what courses and teachers they will have. The teachers must also agree to work with them. Together, the family and the teacher design an individual educa-

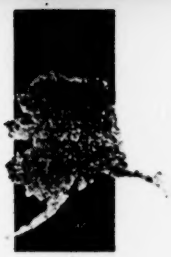


tion plan that maps out the goals and objectives for selected coursework. The plan, which can be modified as needed, also spells out the logistics of when and how the teacher and student will meet. Once this is completed and appropriate materials are purchased, the courses can begin.

Because of the variety of classes offered and the uniqueness of each arrangement, there really is no typical FPCS course. Some take place in instructors' homes; some take place in students' homes; and some occur at local school or community locations. And not all classes are one-on-one instruction. In many instances parents pool their FPCS money and hire a teacher to instruct a small group of children. Because teachers are paid the same hourly wage regardless of group size, families can save money by taking advantage of group instruction. This allows for more frequent instruction, and also presents children with group interaction that enhances social skills.

Observed Outcomes

- Homeschoolers have become a vital part of the district.
- The general public now sees homeschooling as a viable alternative to regular public education. This is due in part to the district's support of homeschooling through FPCS, and also because FPCS students' California Achievement Test scores are on average 10 points higher than the rest of the district.
- As part of the Anchorage School District, FPCS students can take part in extracurricular activities and utilize district resources they would not otherwise have access to.
- FPCS provides low-income families with a means to afford homeschooling.



Keys to Success

- Work to actively involve parents in every facet of your program. Without them, homeschooling and any related programs cannot be successful.
- Secure the support of the school board and district's administrative staff.
- Create an academic policy committee, site council, or similar advisory board that has the power to hire and fire the program's administrator. This gives ownership to the parents who elect members of the academic policy committee, and it also makes a charter school more valid and accountable in the eyes of district leadership.

Location

Net School
Hillsboro School District
561 SE Oak Street
Hillsboro, OR 97123

Contact

Marcia Arganbright, Net School Administrator
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Fax: 503/693-4003
E-Mail: arganbrm@hsd.k12.or.us
Web Site: http://netschool.hsd.k12.or.us/

Description

The Internet has brought new ways of shopping, researching, and communicating. It only seems logical that it has also ushered in new ways of learning. Students of all ages can now go to school online. School no longer has to be a designated building; it can be a community of learners, gathered in thought and purpose. From the privacy of home, students can learn a foreign language, examine American history, or contemplate advanced mathematics and literature. This electronic classroom concept has proven to be especially attractive to many homeschooling families. They can now supplement home instruction with the expertise of professional teachers and consultants, without ever entering a school. These "cyber schools," as they are often called, are emerging throughout the country.

One such program was launched in the 1998-99 school year in Oregon's Hillsboro School District. Called Net School, the program targets homeschooled students who are in the second through 12th grades. Students who are unable to attend Hills-

boro schools due to disciplinary and related reasons are also eligible to use Net School. It began when district leaders heard about a similar program in a neighboring state, and determined it was a concept that would lend itself well to the needs of their community. Because Hillsboro is a district that has always sought to reach out to homeschooling families, Net School seemed like a natural extension of their efforts. Several reasons motivated their decision to pursue the plan:

- Net School would provide the district with a new avenue for reaching homeschool students and their families.
- Net School would provide an additional opportunity for students who were less successful in both traditional-school settings and homeschool environments.
- Net School would enable the district to build a bridge for homeschool families who want their children back in a public-school setting.
- Net School would provide the district with additional per-pupil funding from the state.

The former assistant principal of Hillsboro High School, Marcia Arganbright, was hired as administrator of Net School. She spent her first months on the job researching similar programs around the country. From there she was able to begin defining and outlining how Net School would operate. The next step was a series of mailings sent to the district's 310 homeschooling students' families, explaining the Net School concept and inviting them to peruse the newly designed Net School web site. Subsequently, they were invited to informational meetings led by Arganbright to hear the plans for Net School, and provide input on their particular needs, hopes, and concerns. At that meeting the district learned several things from those in attendance.

First they learned that families homeschool for a variety of reasons. They also learned that while some families wanted nothing to do with Net School or the school district, others were excited about a potential partnership. Based on what was learned at the initial meetings, Net School began to take shape. At the elementary and middle levels, families indicated they were most interested in core academic subjects. Parents of older high school students also expressed interest in core academics, but noted elective courses as an additional area of focus.

In the months that followed, the district held a series of focus group sessions to refine and clarify the implementation of Net School. Involved in the focus group meetings were district administrators, counselors, alternative school staff, alternative school students, teachers, and homeschool parents. Participants pondered what would be ideal, what would work, and what wouldn't work.

Taking into account all of the suggestions and information gathered from the various planning phases, Net School officially opened in January 1999. Eight courses were offered that semester to 37 students: three math classes; two elementary science classes; two high school social studies classes; and one high school English class. Four part-time teachers became Net School's inaugural instructors. Two are currently on staff with the district and took on Net School as an additional responsibility; the other two are former district employees (one is retired and the other is an at-home parent) who found Net School fit perfectly in their new lifestyles. A criterion for everyone involved with Net School is respect and support for families choosing to homeschool. This includes the school board and district administration.

Before classes began in February, a group orientation was held for all students and their families where they learned how to

use the technology that was necessary for Net School. Most participating students have access to home computer systems, but those who do not can use school computer labs. Net School also provides a technical support phone service for technology-related questions.

Students who attend Net School, like any homeschooled students, have instructional experiences that vary greatly from day to day. One day, they may work on only one subject the entire day, while the next may find them working through several subjects. Net School expects that students will work an average of five hours a week on each Net School course. This requires that they budget their time, which can be challenging for many students, but with parental guidance and support, the system works very well.

Students communicate with their teachers solely through e-mail, which generally centers around assignments and evaluation. Each Net School course has an assigned teacher who provides enrolled students with feedback and responses to questions. Through this e-mail dialogue teachers and students develop a rapport that often goes beyond discussions about lessons, and extends to topics that teachers and students talk about in any setting—hobbies, interests, life goals, etc. Students also communicate with each other via e-mail. They discuss lessons, share resource ideas, and ask each other questions. Teachers are able to participate in these student discussions and interject thoughts and ideas when necessary.

Observed Outcomes

- Net School students who have homeschooled prior to enrolling are more likely to stick with the program than students who came to Net School under other circumstances.
- Net School surveys find that most current students intend to continue the program as long as course offerings continue to meet their needs.
- For students who are going back to regular public schools, Net School offers them a gradual transition to the school building environment.
- Parents of Net School students have expressed their appreciation of the program for its willingness to work with them, and because it provides their children with an added learning motivation.
- Net School students like the program because it allows them to work at their own pace, and enables them to "talk" with their classmates, thus helping them feel less isolated.

Keys to Success

- Before implementing any program such as Net School, talk to your community to find out what exactly is needed and base the program design on these needs.
- Prior to and during implementation, provide staff with ample resources and time for professional development.
- Familiarize yourself with state regulations that pertain to accounting for students, state funding, homeschooling, accreditation, and standardization.
- Don't reinvent the wheel—call on those who have started down the path already and ask for their advice and assistance.

Location

Battle Ground School District
HomeLink Resource Center
P.O. Box 200
Battle Ground, WA 98604

Contact

Larry Pierson, Coordinator, grades K-8
Gary Albers, Coordinator, grades 9-12
Phone: 360/687-9330
Fax: 360/687-3040
Web Site: http://www.parentpartners.net/
E-mail: homelink@bgsd.k12.wa.us

Description

In an effort to reach out to its growing home school population and to provide them with valuable educational assistance, the Battle Ground School District implemented a program called HomeLink in 1993. Technically an alternative school program, HomeLink enables homeschooled students, grades K-12, to access the district as part-time students for a variety of courses and services. HomeLink offers individualized experiences that enhance home education for over 1,100 students and their parents. The goal of HomeLink is to support, not supplant what families are already doing for their children. Parents are intricately involved in the success of the program, from consulting with other parents, to teaching elective courses, to serving on the Parent Advisory Team (PAT) and site council. The district feels very strongly that in order for HomeLink to remain a strong and attractive option for homeschooling families, it must stay in tune with the specific needs of this unique population. This would be impossible if parents did not play an intricate role in all facets of the program.

The HomeLink campus is a bustling place filled with classrooms, computer labs, offices and educational materials. No corner goes unused. Parents and children come and go throughout the day as their schedules dictate. Two indications of the success of HomeLink in the district are the 15,400 square foot campus addition that opened in the Fall of 1999, and the growing satellite program implemented three years ago in a neighboring school district.

HomeLink is staffed by certified teachers, paraprofessionals, parent consultants, two administrators and classified staff. All 100 staff members share a common dedication to the concept of homeschooling. They respect the choices homeschooling families have made and work to support those decisions.

Services provided by HomeLink can be best described on a continuum from least to greatest direct student/parent engagement in the program, meaning time spent physically at the HomeLink site, as well as the amount of services received. As the following chart indicates, the farther right one moves on the continuum, the greater the amount of engagement. The graphic is followed by a description of each service.

HOMELINK CONTINUUM OF ENGAGEMENT

Least Engagement ➤ ➤ Greatest Engagement

Elective Courses	Diploma Program	ClassLink	CAM
(all age groups)	*(high school students)*	*(grades K-8)*	*(grades 7-12)*

ELECTIVES

HomeLink elective classes are specifically designed to meet the needs of home-based educators and their children (K-8). By design, these free, non-credit classes are family friendly, accommodating different ability levels concurrently, thus making it possible for families with two or more homeschooled children to attend at once. Most are year-long courses and meet for one-and-a-half hours each week. It is completely up to students and their parents to determine what electives (if any) to pursue. HomeLink parents have a large role in the design and implementation of the classes, and often are the paid instructors. Families can take advantage of elective course offerings without any further engagement with HomeLink, provided they attend less than half time. The goal is for these courses to be relevant, useful, and fun.

Two types of elective courses are offered through HomeLink, Discovery and Trek. They are distinguished by their content. Trek classes focus on skill and mastery in a core area like math, science, writing, or reading, and are taught by certified staff. Discovery courses, generally taught by paraprofessionals, are meant to be less academic and can include topics such as crafts, cooking, or physical education activities. They are also distinguishable by the role parents are expected to play—parents are required to attend Trek classes and work as a team with the classroom teacher, while parents attend Discovery classes only on a rotating basis.

Examples of the more than 100 HomeLink elective classes offered include sign language, Spanish, gymnastics, chess, drama, math, and writer's workshop. Certified teachers instruct additional electives like band, and numerous science, computer, and art labs.

Diploma Program

HomeLink's high school diploma program is designed to allow families of high school students the opportunity to combine public education with an individualized home education to earn a high school diploma. Technically, students are enrolled as full-time students in the Battle Ground School District, but all of their coursework is completed at home. Students and their parents are required to meet weekly for one hour with a certificated HomeLink consultant to record home study hours, review course work, and discuss goals for the upcoming week. The consultant's main responsibilities are to assist families with developing written contracts for each class, selecting appropriate curriculum, providing feedback and direction regarding student work, and awarding grades and credits as appropriate.

ClassLink

ClassLink is a cluster of graded, project-based classes taught by certified teachers. These classes, available to students in grades five through eight, meet two days each week throughout the school year. Fifth and sixth-graders are taught in one group, seventh and eighth in another. The integrated curriculum includes computer technology, writing, and a two year rotation of science and history. District-approved history and science textbooks are provided for each student. ClassLink is for parents who may be new to homeschooling and want to transition slowly to full-time home education. It is also for parents who want a more structured setting to supplement what they are already doing at home with their children. Parents appreciate that ClassLink provides them with the guidance and expertise of a certified teacher.

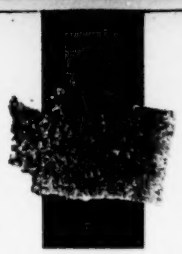
Parents are required to assist in ClassLink rooms for a half day each month, which allows them to see student interaction and

teacher instruction. To continually refine and enhance their instructional skills, all ClassLink parents are required to participate in monthly consultations with "expert home school educators" on the day they assist in the classroom. Parents are responsible for documenting additional weekly hours of home study using the plan/record book provided by HomeLink to attain a combined total of 25 student learning hours per week. Parents must also attend a monthly planning and strategy session.

CAM

Character, Academics, Marketplace (CAM) High School is classified as an alternative secondary school. Located on the HomeLink campus, the school serves students in grades seven through 12. It is geared toward students who previously homeschooled and to former private school students. CAM curriculum and structure take into account many of the things this particular student population and their families value, such as parent involvement in all facets of schooling, small classes, and character education. Students attend CAM full-time Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, and use Wednesday to pursue elective credits such as physical education and community service projects.

In addition to its many offerings for students, HomeLink provides consultation services for parents. Called PrimeLink, these services are targeted at parents of students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The consultants are themselves homeschooling parents who have developed an expertise in home education as a result of being home teachers for several years. They also receive training from HomeLink staff. The intent of the program is to provide parents with emotional and technical support necessary for successful home school experiences.



Parents involved in PrimeLink meet with a consultant one to four times per month to design curriculum for their children. Special attention is given to helping parents access HomeLink resources including classes, software, videos, books, audio tapes, learning kits, and curriculum examples. Parents also have the option of attending regularly scheduled seminars on curriculum, teaching strategies, authentic assessment, and other topics of interest. PrimeLink consultants monitor the home program, and ensure that essential learning requirements are targeted, as specified by Washington education legislation. Parents furnish documentation of at least 20 hours of total weekly instruction, including all elective classes, for the primary grades, and 25 hours a week for fourth through eighth grades.

Everything that happens at HomeLink is done with the interests of families at heart. The Parent Advisory Team and HomeLink's administrative team are committed to supporting homeschooling families without displacing home education. It is also important to the instructional team at HomeLink that parents' primary focus be on homeschooling, and not on partnering with HomeLink.

Observed Outcomes

- Standardized test scores for HomeLink students have consistently ranked near the top of Washington schools.
- A spirit of cooperation between the district and its homeschooling families has replaced the friction and discord that once existed between the two groups.
- In 1993, only 60 families showed up for HomeLink's inaugural orientation; now the program boasts an enrollment of over 1,100 students, and is growing.

- Though homeschooling families don't need the services of HomeLink, they acknowledge how valuable the program is, and openly express their appreciation.

Keys to Success

- Build programs from the ground up by intricately involving the homeschooling community in all facets of design and implementation.
- Establish your mission early, and accompany it with a set of core values that can guide all subsequent work and implementation.
- Determine what specific features will set your program apart from others. HomeLink calls these "critical distinctives," and lists parent partnering and numerous options as some of its key features.
- Visit other programs you wish to emulate to see what they look like and how similar efforts could be adapted to your community.
- Do not try to be all things to all people. Choose one or two services where you can produce the greatest good and provide those services superbly. Allow growth to drive your expansion.

Appendix:
State Homeschool Coordinators

Idaho

Tom Farley
Bob Fontaine
(208) 332-6942

Montana

Cebe Sobonya
(406) 444-4527

Oregon

Don Perkins
(503) 378-5585 x677

Washington

Melinda Dyer
(360) 664-3574

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